

John Alfred Irvine

Grand Master (1963 – 1965) of the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons
of Canada in the Province of Ontario



Photo from the Grand Lodge

(1912 – 1996)

Prepared by V.W. Bro. Marshall Kern.

John Alfred Irvine was born on January 26, 1912, on Wolfe Island, Ontario. Wolfe Island is near Kingston and the largest of the Thousand Islands. His parents, Byron and Rachella Irvine, were of United Empire Loyalist descent and Irish extraction and their son, John, received his primary education in the typical one-room white schoolhouse, S.S. No. 14, on Wolfe Island. At the age of thirteen he sailed as a deckhand and later as an able-bodied seaman, first on the Great Lakes and then along the Atlantic coast from Newfoundland to Jamaica. When not sailing he completed his secondary schooling and graduated from Kingston Collegiate in 1930. He enrolled at Queen's University and completed his first year in a BA program.



As with many other men named 'John', the informal nickname of 'Jack' was used by those who knew him well. Jack Irvine felt there was greater opportunity in business and joined the Hoover Company, selling vacuum cleaners door-to-door. Within one year he was placed in charge of the Toronto area and within six years, he was District Manager for the whole Southwestern Ontario region, working out of London.

In 1939 John A. Irvine volunteered for the Canadian Army but was given only a temporary category due to a left arm injury. He joined the militia and was eventually placed on the reserve list of officers in 1945 with the rank of Captain.

In 1947 he left Hoover and established himself in London under the name "Irvine Appliances" and operated the company until his retirement in 1961. During this period, he was also interested in other businesses including restaurant, construction and real estate.

John A. "Jack" Irvine was an active member of the North London Kiwanis Club.

John A. "Jack" Irvine entered municipal politics in 1959, becoming an alderman for the City of London. Jack Irvine left local politics in 1963 to run for federal office. Jack Irvine was elected to the House of Commons as a Progressive Conservative party member for the London riding in the 1963 general election. He was re-elected in the 1965 election. After electoral district boundary changes in the late 1960s, The Hon. Jack Irvine campaigned in the London West constituency for the 1968 federal election but lost. Having served as a Member of Parliament for over 5 years he decided not to run for office again.

He married Doris Virginia Seeley (1918 – 1967) of Owen Sound on July 3, 1937. They had one son, John H. Irvine. After the death of Doris, John A. Irvine married Winnifred M. Matthews (1917 – 2014). The family lived for most of its life in Lambeth and were supporters of Trinity Anglican Church.

M. W. Bro. John Alfred Irvine died on July 20, 1996.

M.W. Bro. John Alfred Irvine is interred in Woodland Cemetery, London. His wife Doris is interred beside him. In 2018 the brethren of St. John's Lodge No. 209A added an engraved marker for his grave. The marker has the Square & Compasses logo and the inscription reads:

M.W. Bro. John Alfred Irvine
WM St John's Lodge No. 209a 1950
Grand Master Grand Lodge AF&AM of Canada in the Province of Ontario 1963-1965
Grand Secretary, 1971-1979
Presented by St John's Lodge No. 209A
2018

Masonic Career

Mr. John Alfred Irvine was initiated into St. John's Lodge, No. 209A, London, on June 6, 1941, and served as Worshipful Master for 1950 - 1951.

He was elected as Grand Senior Warden of Grand Lodge for 1955 - 1956. Then he was elected to the Board of General Purposes in 1958, and 1959, and also 1960, for one-year terms. He was elected as Deputy Grand Master (1961 - 1962 and 1962 - 1963).

M.W. Bro. John Alfred Irvine was elected as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M of Canada in the Province of Ontario for the 1963 - 1964 and 1964 - 1965 terms.

He was appointed as the Grand Representative of the Grand Lodge of Ireland near our Grand Lodge, and also the Grand Representative of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba near our Grand Lodge.

He was a member of St. John's Chapter No. 4, London and the Richard Coeur de Lion Preceptory No. 4, London. On April 20th, 1964, he was made Honorary Past First Principal by Grand Chapter of Canada, in the Province of Ontario, Royal Arch Masons.

He was a member of the London Lodge of Perfection, serving as Thrice Puissant Grand Master in 1959. He continued with the London Sovereign Chapter Rose Croix, and Moore Sovereign Consistory, Hamilton. He was coroneted as an Honorary Inspector General, 33° for Scottish Rite on September 10, 1963.

He was a member of the Shrine, being made an Honorary Life Member of the Ottawa Shrine Club in 1964. He was named an Honorary Life Member in several Shrine Temples in Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

By the end of his term as Grand Master, M.W. Bro. John A. Irvine had received honorary membership in St. John's Lodge No. 20 (London), Kilwinning Lodge No. 64 (London), Irving Lodge No. 154 (Lucan), Ulster Lodge No. 537 (Toronto), and Kroy Lodge No. 676 (Toronto).

On September 12, 1964, at an International Masonic Day event in Cleveland, Ohio, M.W. Bro. John A. Irvine was presented with an Honorary Life Membership in Brooklyn Lodge No. 454, Grand Lodge of Ohio.

As Grand Master

Our 51st Grand Master, M.W. Bro. John A. "Jack" Irvine had the sad duty of announcing the death of M.W. Bro. Clarence MacLeod Pitts. On March 16th, 1965, M.W. Bro. Clarence MacLeod Pitts, while attending a meeting of the Advisory Council of the Presbyterian Church of Canada at Toronto, suffered a coronary attack and was immediately confined to Toronto General Hospital. He appeared to be making slow

progress toward recovery, when, without warning, he suffered a fatal stroke on Wednesday, April 7th, and passed away on Saturday, April 10th, 1965, without regaining consciousness. M.W. Bro. Irvine provided an extensive biography of the Past Grand Master during his Address at the Grand Lodge Communication. Following this, the Grand Chaplain conducted a Memorial Service.

A significant event for M.W. Bro. Irvine, and a major milestone for the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario was the establishing of the Masonic Foundation of Ontario. This was achieved after several years of dedicated effort with M.W. Bro. Irvine being involved as a member of the Special Committee that pursued its creation. The Special Committee determined that the best path to success was to have the Provincial Parliament pass a special Act, granting a charter and charitable status to The Masonic Foundation of Ontario.

The first meeting of The Masonic Foundation of Ontario was on July 14th, 1964, immediately prior to the Grand Lodge Communication. The first meeting was devoted exclusively to matters of organization; by-laws were passed and Directors for the ensuing year were elected. The first Directors were: Grand Master M.W. Bro. John A. Irvine, the Deputy Grand Master R.W. Bro. James N. Allan, M.W. Bro. H. L. Martyn, M.W. Bro. C. M. Pitts, M.W. Bro. R. W. Treleaven, R.W. Bro. R. C. Berkinshaw, R.W. Bro. T. L. Wilson, R.W. Bro. Donald M. Fleming, and Bro. Norman W. Byrne, Q.C. (later to become M.W. Bro. Byrne, Grand Master for 1991 – 1993).

The first officers of the Masonic Foundation of Ontario were: President – M.W. Bro. R. W. Treleaven. First Vice-President – R.W. Bro. R. C. Berkinshaw. Second Vice-President – M.W. Bro. C. M. Pitts. And Sec.-Treas. – Bro. Norman W. Byrne, Q.C.

A second significant item during the term of office of M.W. Bro. John A. Irvine was the introduction of new lapel pins to replace various long-service medals, pins and bars. This had been recommended a year previously by M.W. Bro. Treleaven and studied by an esteemed committee with several past and future Grand Masters as members. M.W. Irvine declared: “These buttons are to take the place of all such medals, pins and bars excepting the William Mercer Wilson Medal. These have now been received and have been replacing the former presentations since May 1st, 1964.” He added: “I might say these buttons have been very enthusiastically received, one of the reasons being that a brother can wear it every day.”

Of personal significance to M.W. Bro. John A. Irvine was the event on January 31, 1964. He explained: “it was my extreme pleasure to have the privilege of initiating my son, John H. Irvine, into our beloved fraternity in St. John's Lodge No. 209A, London. This was the first meeting in the beautiful new Masonic Temple in London. ... Some five hundred and seventy brethren attended this meeting among whom were, the Deputy Grand Master, M. W. Bro. E. G. Dixon, M. W. Bro. R. W. Treleaven, the Grand Senior Warden, Grand Junior Warden, The Grand Chaplain, 12 members of the Board of

General Purposes, 13 District Deputy Grand Masters, V. W. Bro. W. D. Graham, Grand Director of Ceremonies, V. W. Bro. F. B. Robinson, Grand Senior Deacon, and some 15 other appointed Grand Lodge officers for the current year. I had the pleasure of presiding at this meeting and was assisted in conferring the degree by the Past Masters who served with me as officers when I was Master in 1950. This, my brethren, was a real highlight of the year and an occasion I shall never forget. A toast was proposed to the newly initiated member, and I was indeed proud of the manner in which my son, and new brother, responded."

Grand Master John A. Irvine delivered a ruling after the now-familiar red and white maple leaf flag of Canada was inaugurated on February 15, 1965. He declared: "The official Canadian Flag, as recently approved by the Parliament of Canada, must be given precedence, and must be displayed in Lodge Rooms and Banquet Rooms if other flags are displayed."

(As an aside, it must be noted that another Mason was instrumental in bringing the Canadian Maple Leaf flag into reality. Bro. John Ross Matheson was a leading member of the multi-party parliamentary committee whose mandate was to select a new flag design for Canada. He and Dr. George Stanley (then Dean of Arts at the Royal Military College) collaborated on the design which was ultimately approved by Parliament. Bro. Matheson was initiated in Queen's Lodge No. 578 at Kingston in 1940 and was passed and raised in lodges in England while serving on active duty during World War II. He was awarded the William Mercer Wilson Medal in 1988.)

Much of Grand Master Irvine's annual Addresses to the Grand Lodge Communication showed his attention to decorum and protocol. He deplored the use of "The Yellow Dog Degree", which he said was making a burlesque of Masonic proceedings. He asserted that "no Mason should join this organization or be associated with it in any way."

M.W. Bro. Irvine reminded his audience that the proper term is 'Worshipful Master', not 'Sitting Master' nor 'Ruling Master'. He instructed that when we address a brother we should first use his proper Masonic title and his last name, not a simple 'Bro. Bob' introduction. With regard to District Deputy Grand Masters, he reminded them that it is always considered proper that the D.D.G.M. and other members of the Board of General Purposes appear at all functions in full dress – "this means white tie and tails."

Other administrative matters were summarized in his final Address to the Grand Lodge Communication. Grand Master Irvine spoke of initiation fees – "make them high enough to be selective, but not too high"; and annual dues – "every Lodge should be self-sustaining without the admission of new members"; and "Proper observance of protocol, on a lodge level, on a District plane and on the Grand Lodge plateau." He emphasized that "Most of all we must, in effecting such a reform, keep our sights high,

propagate our Ancient Landmarks, protect our ritual and look ever forward and upward in furthering the interests of our Masonic way of life.”

M.W. Bro. John A. “Jack” Irvine concluded his term as Grand Master with a simple and direct message to his audience. “In closing, may I say to you that it is my sincere hope that the sunlight of Masonic Brotherhood may forever shine brightly on each of you and assist all of us in a continuing belief in the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God.”

As Past Grand Master

M.W. Bro. John A. “Jack” Irvine served as the Grand Secretary from 1971 through 1979.

His death was announced by Grand Master Durward Ivan Greenwood at the 2018 Grand Lodge Communication. In eulogizing M.W. Bro. Irvine, he said “M.W. Bro. Irvine possessed in rare balance the qualities that go to make up the really useful Masonic servant; integrity beyond reproach; unselfishness that allowed him to treat opportunities for service as synonymous with duties; ability to clearly evaluate a problem and the capacity to understand Masons and to assist them to put their Masonry on a high level. ... It truly mattered that John Alfred Irvine was here on this earth, in this place, during our time.”

Sources:

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- (4) Herrington, W. S., and Foley, R.S., editor Dunlop, Wm. J. ‘*A History of the Grand Lodge A.F.&A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario*’(1955) McCallum Press Ltd., Toronto.
- (5) McLeod, Wallace editor, *Whence Come We?* (1980) Hamilton, Grand Lodge of A.F.&A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario
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